
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	(x) Agenda
Address:	513 C Street, NE	() Consent
		(x) Concept
Meeting Date:	March 28, 2013	(x) Alteration
Case Number:	13-116	(x) New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Frances McMillen	(x) Demolition
		(x) Subdivision

Oracle Builders, with plans prepared by Carmel Greer of District Design LLC, seeks concept review for the construction of two new rowhouses at 513 C Street, NE in the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Property Description

The two-story commercial property at 513 C Street, NE, which faces onto Stanton Park, originally housed the Stanton Theater. In the mid twentieth century, the theater was closed and the building completely refaced. The current brick façade is largely devoid of architectural detail, with its large expanses of masonry and proportionately small window openings creating a formidable appearance on the block. Similarly, the front yard of 513 C is completely paved in concrete, resulting in an unfortunate mid-block break in the continuity of planted public space. The property includes a side court along the west elevation, and the building footprint currently fills the entire lot. The rear elevation of the block is visible from 6th Street due to the presence of an open lot (used as a community garden) behind 513 C.

In 2006, the Board approved a rear and partial rooftop addition at 509 C Street, NE (HPA #06-185). That project included roof deck railings on both the front and rear elevations, and the Board accepted at the time that these elements would be somewhat visible in long views from Stanton Park and when viewed over the community garden on 6th Street.

Proposal

The project calls for the demolition of the existing building and the construction of two, three-story rowhouses that extend the width of the lot, thereby eliminating the open side court. The houses will measure 42' in height to the top of their cornices, which is just below the height of the three-story building at the corner of 6th and C.

The front and side elevations will be clad in brick; the rear will be clad in hardiplank siding. Detailing on the front elevation includes Italianate features such as bracketed cornices, 2-over-2 windows, and prominent door surrounds. The houses will each include a basement entrance on

the front elevation, rear balconies on the second and third floors, and a roof deck. Though the existing building covers the entire lot, the new townhouses will have shallower footprints, pulled in from the alley in order to provide parking pads and backyards.

Evaluation

The complete refacing of the theater building in the mid-20th century has resulted in a loss of character such that its original use as a theater is no longer perceptible. As the building no longer conveys its original appearance or use, and no longer has character-defining features, the HPO recommends that it be considered non-contributing due to a loss of integrity.

A subdivision will be needed to divide the lot in half, such that the two houses become fee simple lots. The proposed width of the new houses is consistent with others on Capitol Hill, and the subdivision raises no preservation issues.

The buildings located on the south side of the 500 block of C Street range in height, design, and era of construction. They include two bay-fronts that are three stories in height plus raised basements, a handful of two-story flat-front Italianate buildings, and the grand Italianate Villa style building at the corner of 5th and C. As a result, some flexibility may be taken with massing of 513 C, as it is not being inserted into a row of structures that have an absolute uniformity of height or scale. The applicants have selected a traditional design vocabulary, closely based on the historic, three-story Italianate houses that can be found elsewhere on Capitol Hill. The massing and design direction are very similar to the rows of Board-approved infill construction at 500-504 East Capitol Street, NE, 640-658 Massachusetts Avenue, NE, 216-232 7th Street, NE, and 12-14 7th Street, NE, all of which closely follow the style of three-story Italianate rowhouses.

The proposal includes partially submerged basement units, which will be accessed via a set of stairs extending parallel to the face of the building. Though the more common historic configuration located the basement steps perpendicular to the face of the building (alongside the main staircase), the shallow front yard at this property would be largely consumed by excavation in that scenario. By placing the staircase against the building in this case, where some flexibility should be afforded as new construction, the area between the basement stairs and the sidewalk can be landscaped to help screen views. Meter boxes and gas meters should be placed in the basement areaway, not on the front elevation above grade or in the front yard.

The applicants have been working with HPO and the community to refine the detailing for the façade's window and door headers, pane configuration, front steps, railings, and cornice. The elevation drawing (A-201) reflects these updates; some very minor adjustments to the spacing of the windows may still be needed so that the windows aren't so close to the outside edges of the buildings. The drawings submitted do not include details on the proposed material treatment of the front and side walls. Additional notes should be added to construction drawings to denote the use of face brick on the front elevation and common brick on the side elevation, with specifics on how these two materials will meet (the face brick should wrap around to the side walls by a few courses). A sample of the brick should be submitted for HPO review as part of the permit application.

One element of the design that is not common to historic buildings on Capitol Hill and in other rowhouses neighborhoods is the proposal to provide roof decks and rooftop access structures. Even on new construction, the Board has generally required that these elements be unobtrusive in street views. This often requires a setback of several feet from the front elevation and the use of a sloped roof on the access stair structure. This particular location merits careful attention, as the presence of Stanton Park and wide intersections nearby will create long vantage points from which the rooftops of the new buildings can be seen.

In this case, the plans show parapet walls of 36" in height on both the front and rear walls, which should screen the railings in head-on views. Because the buildings will be taller than the structures on each side, the side walls should include parapets of the same height, effectively enclosing the roof decks within the shell of the building and completely screening views of the lower 3' of the access structures. The perspective renderings appear to show that the side walls will reach the same height as the front wall, but this detail is unclear in the sightline drawings and section drawings.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board approve the concept as consistent with the purposes of the preservation act and delegate final approval to staff with the following conditions:

- *The side walls of the buildings should extend to the same height as the front wall, thereby providing a parapet to help screen roof deck elements from view;*
- *The use of face brick on the front elevations and common brick on the side elevations should be noted in the plans, with a material sample provided for HPO review before final approval;*
- *Detailed specifications for windows, doors, railings and steps, paving, fencing should be finalized in consultation with HPO;*
- *Meter boxes and gas meters should be placed in the basement areaway, with details shown on the final plans.*